

Section One—Page Fourteen

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## Carter and the CIA

President Carter's press conference response to the furor over reports of Central Intelligence Agency payments to foreign heads of state and his alleged cutoff of such funds indicates that the CIA, at least, is going to be safe with him. His response was firmly equivocal — his review of CIA activities has turned up nothing "illegal or improper," and further deponent saith not.

On the specific allegations, that is. On related matters he was specific and practical. If he does discover something illegal or improper, he will be the first to blow the whistle publicly and put a stop to it. And he is working to reduce the number of people privy to intelligence operations secrets.

The first, one takes as a matter of necessary faith. While not all of the spy business is secret dirty work, a lot of it is. (We do not include as such payments to Jordanian King Hussein, for example. The intelligence and strategic harvest from that "subsidy" must have been enormous and enormously useful. Payments to others may have been comparable, maybe not; but the procedure is valid.) One elects a president and trusts him to supervise the spy apparatus responsibly; one also elects congressmen to monitor the performance.

The second is a practical con-

cern that may at last get some serious consideration. Mr. Carter says he has reduced from 40 to five the number of executive branch officials with routine access to covert CIA operations. He wants Congress to follow suit in its committee structure, and some House leaders seem willing.

Seven congressional committees — three in the House, four in the Senate — must now be briefed on CIA business because of their legislative jurisdictions. Their need of certain information is legitimate, and checks and balances is a deliberately unwieldy system. But it seems to us that a joint House-Senate intelligence committee, whose members would include members of the other committees for liaison, could function more efficiently — and just as strictly — as the overall overseer.

As for the executive branch, after the unsettling nomination of Theodore Sorenson as head of the CIA — Mr. Sorenson withdrew his name after an avalanche of criticism, so we will never know how he would have done — President Carter has found in Adm. Stansfield Turner a nominee who seems to have optimum qualifications and general support. Perhaps there are better days ahead for the CIA, the national interest and the public's nerves.